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Research Memorandum

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SUPPORT INCREASES FOR INF LINKED TO ARMS TALKS, BUT FEW FAVOR NUCLEAR FIRST USE

This is a report of USICA public opinion surveys in mid- and late April by the Gallup affiliates in Britain, Germany, and Italy, and by Demoscopie in France. About 1000 adults were interviewed in each country. Interviews in Britain were conducted while the British fleet was en route to the Falkland Islands.

Summary

West Europeans are divided over INF deployment. However, support generally prevails when stationing is linked to arms talks. In fact, conditional support for INF is back to about the same level as before the anti-nuclear demonstrations last fall. Moreover, the perception is growing that INF will strengthen Western deterrence. Relatively few, however, favor NATO's first use of nuclear weapons in Europe. At the same time, pro-NATO sentiment is widespread and increasing.

End Summary

When INF Linked to Talks, Support Prevails

When told of Soviet dominance in European INF missiles, West European publics are divided over INF stationing. Support prevails in Britain (50%-to-37%), while opposition prevails in Italy (41%to-52%). Opinion is closely split in France (45%-to-40%) and West Germany (38%-to-39%). In the case of the FRG, this is a significant shift since January when opposition outweighed approval by 41-to-32 percent.

However, except in Italy, support for INF stationing when liked to arms talks has widened, apparently reversing declines registered in the wake of last fall's anti-nuclear demonstrations.

More specifically, the proportion favoring INF stationing if arms talks fail or if they are underway at the same time remains the same in Italy (40%), but has increased by nearly ten percent since February to the prevailing view in Britain (53%), France (44%), and West Germany (49%). Conditional supporters now equal or surpass their numbers of last summer. A handful (8% to 12%) in all countries favor INF regardless of arms talks. (See attached chart)

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Taken together, conditional and unconditional supporters of INF deployment now constitute majorities in Britain (65%), France (56%), and West Germany (58%).

As the chart shows, unconditional opposition likewise has declined. It stands at about 30 percent in Britain, France, and West Germany, but higher (44%) in Italy. This is a drop of about ten percent in Britain and West Germany, and somewhat less in Italy, since last fall and winter. The decline in opposition leaves Italian opinion closely divided between opposition (44%) and support (48%).

While public views on INF have changed in recent months, there continues to be extensive public unawareness or misinformation about the Soviet monopoly of European INF missiles. While three-quarters or more in all four countries are aware of missiles such as the SS-20 on Soviet soil, about the same number don't know or think NATO has offsetting INF missile capabilities. These figures are substantially unchanged since last summer.

View That INF Strengthens Deterrence Fairly Widespread

Steady or increasing public support for INF may reflect the growing perception that INF will strengthen deterrence. Majorities in Britain (56%-to-22%) and France (55%-to-27%) and pluralities in West Germany (47%-to-21%) and Italy (48%-to-33%) think that deploying INF missiles in Europe will help prevent a Soviet attack rather than make one more likely.

In the last six months, the view that INF enhances Western deterrence has grown by about ten percent in the UK, France, and Germany.

At the same time, though, West Europeans tend to see little if any likelihood of a Soviet attack on Western Europe in the next five years. Clear majorities (of 60% to 80%) say an attack is unlikely. And, except in France, not more than one-in-five believes the contrary. In France this figure is 29 percent--double what it was last July.

Reagan Proposal Widely Favored Over Brezhnev Plan

Of the public INF arms talks proposals made by both sides, wide majorities in each of the four countries prefer President Reagan's zero-option proposal to the Brezhnev freeze

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plan as "more likely to prevent war." At most only one-in-five favors the Kremlin's proposal to freeze INF missiles in European Russia in return for NATO cancelling its plans to deploy U.S. INF.

On credibility too, Mr. Reagan's proposal comes out on top. Majorities in West Germany (58%) and Italy (56%) and pluralities (of about 50%) in Britain and France believe the President's proposal is "a sincere effort to reduce nuclear weapons in Europe." In sharp contrast, Brezhnev's plan is disbelieved by as many or more.

Relatively few West Europeans are confident that INF talks will succeed in the next two years. February surveys showed that pessisism about the success of the talks prevailed in every country except Italy.

Relatively Few Favor First Use of Nuclear Weapons

Despite the general belief that INF missiles will help to deter Soviet aggression, most West Europeans oppose NATO's first use of nuclear weapons. Except in the UK, where there is less opposition to the use of nuclear weapons, no more than one-fifth or fewer favor NATO using nuclear weapons in response to a conventional Soviet attack that "threatened to overwhelm NATO forces." Another one-third approves only if the Soviets use them first. And roughly one-third rejects any use of nuclear weapons by NATO.

The level of overall opposition has declined markedly in recent months (except in France) and now stands about where it did last summer. Striking reversals of public opinion occurred in Germany and Italy:

- o German opinion went from a plurality (48%-to-42%) opposed to NATO's use of nuclear weapons in January to a majority (55%-to-34%) in support in April.

- o Italian opinion similarly reversed from a majority (55%-to-41%) opposed last October to a nearly similar-sized majority (56%-to-39%) in favor.

Few Believe U.S. Has Nuclear Superiority over the USSR

At the same time that West Europeans generally oppose first use, the belief is widespread that the U.S. is no longer superior to the Soviet Union in nuclear strength. By narrow margins, pluralities in France and Italy perceive the U.S.

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and USSR as about equal. German opinion splits between parity (38%) and Soviet superiority (35%).

In general, from one-tenth to one-fifth in each of these countries see the U.S. as ahead. Two to three times this many (about a third) see the Soviets as ahead.

The picture five years hence is equally gloomy for the West. No more believe the U.S. will be ahead in five years than believe it to be ahead today. Similarly, about the same number that see a nuclear balance today also see this in five years. However, the proportions seeing the Soviets ahead in five years are about ten percent less than those seeing the Soviets ahead today.

No Diminution in Confidence in U.S. Defense Pledge

Despite these views on the superpower nuclear balance, there is, except in Britain, continuing confidence in the U.S. pledge to defend Western Europe "even if this would risk the destruction of U.S. cities." This view prevails in France (56%-to-37%), Italy (56%-to-39%), and West Germany (52%-to-37%).

British results probably are influenced by the Falklands situation. Interviews done before the U.S. sided with Britain show British opinion split on the confidence issue (49%-to-47%). Last summer, confidence was the view of a 56-to-37 percent majority.

Increased Defense Spending Widely Unpopular

Although West European publics tend at best only to see the U.S. as Russia's military equal and would hesitate to endorse use of nuclear weapons against a Soviet conventional attack, they are reluctant to increase their countries' defense budgets.

Except in Britain, no more than 16 percent favor increasing defense expenditures:

- The prevailing view in France (55%) and in West Germany (43%) is to hold defense spending at present levels.

- Over a quarter in West Germany favor a cut in defense spending--double the number in January. A quarter in France also prefer less defense spending. This is the prevailing view (of 46%) in economically-troubled Italy.

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Interviewed while their fleet was en route to the Falklands, the British showed the highest level of support for increasing defense spending (44%), with only a few (16%) favoring a decrease. About a third (36%) support no change.

Purely economic considerations do not seem to be at the heart of opposition to increases in defense spending. Except in France, nearly half of those who oppose an increase said they still would be opposed even if more defense spending meant more jobs. Between a quarter and a third, however, would support more spending under these conditions. In France, the opposite holds, with half changing their minds and favoring more defense spending if it means more jobs.

Pro-NATO Sentiment Broadens

While there are mixed views on such NATO initiatives as INF and defense spending, the preference for NATO (in France, the Atlantic Alliance) over neutralism is widespread and growing. Everywhere, large majorities--ranging from 59 percent in Italy to 73 percent in Britain--want to stay in the Alliance rather than leave and become neutral.

Pro-Alliance sentiments have increased appreciably since February in Britain and France, and since last July in Italy (when opinion was divided on this issue).

Neutralist views are most widespread in Italy (34%) and France (29%), with one-in-five voicing this preference in Britain and the FRG.

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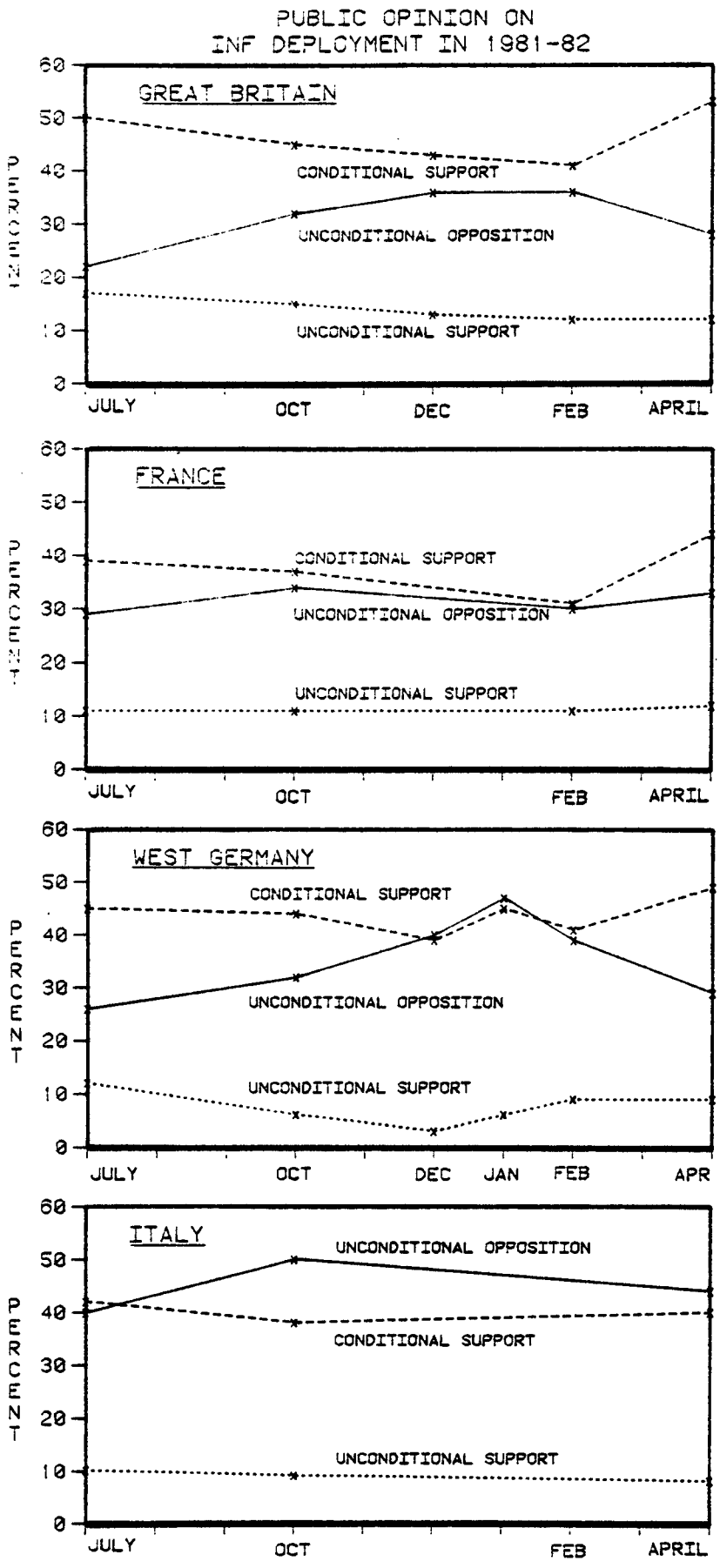

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